



United States Attorney's Office  
District of Columbia

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Acting United States Attorney

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## PRESS RELEASE

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### **Ohio man pleads guilty to Conspiracy to Commit Obstruction of Justice and Perjury in connection with scheme to fool federal judge**

*-- Helped his co-defendant illegally obtain a \$3 million default judgment in a federal defamation lawsuit filed in D.C. against the victim of co-defendant's earlier sexual assault --*

WASHINGTON - A 71-year-old Ohio man, Peter J. Brandel, Sr., has pleaded guilty to Conspiracy to Commit Obstruction of Justice and Perjury in connection with his role in a plot to fool a federal judge into awarding a \$3 million default judgment against the victim of his co-defendant's earlier sex crime, Acting U.S. Attorney Channing D. Phillips and Joseph Persichini, Jr., Assistant Director in Charge of the FBI's Washington Field Office, announced today.

Brandel, of Mansfield, Ohio, entered his guilty plea today before the Honorable Richard J. Leon, U.S. District Judge for the District of Columbia. Brandel faces a statutory sentence of up to five years in prison and a fine of up to \$250,000. Sentencing is scheduled for November 16, 2009. Under the terms of the plea agreement, the government and the defendant have agreed that an appropriate sentence for Brandel would be 24 to 30 months in prison.

A second defendant was arrested and charged last month as the alleged co-conspirator in the scheme, in an indictment returned by a federal grand jury that charged him with the identical offense, Conspiracy to Commit Obstruction of Justice and Perjury.

According to the Statement of the Offense filed by the U.S. Attorney's Office with the Court, Brandel's co-conspirator was convicted in Ohio in 2000 of Gross Sexual Imposition of two 14-year-old students at the private school where he was an instructor. After serving three years in an Ohio prison for the offense, the co-conspirator was paroled to his hometown, the District of Columbia, and ordered not to have any contact with the victims of his earlier crime.

However, while on parole, in June 2007, the co-conspirator decided to file a \$3 million defamation suit in U.S. District Court for the District of Columbia against one of the two victims of his crime, an individual identified in the Statement of the Offense only as "J.C." The lawsuit was assigned to U.S. District Judge Ellen S. Huvelle.

But rather than serve J.C. with a copy of the lawsuit, the co-conspirator recruited Brandel to sign a false affidavit with Judge Huvelle claiming Brandel served the civil action on J.C.

Without J.C.'s knowledge, for more than a month, the co-conspirator filed numerous pleadings for both himself, as plaintiff, and for J.C., as defendant. To obtain Brandel's signature for the pleadings they filed in his name, the co-conspirator convinced Brandel to file a bogus state court lawsuit in Ohio against J.C., but Brandel then agreed to dismiss the action if J.C. would sign an agreement to dismiss the Ohio lawsuit. The two co-conspirators then used that signature on all the court documents they filed for J.C. without his knowledge.

After receiving a document purportedly from J.C. in July 2007 admitting the allegations in the lawsuit and consenting to the default judgment against him, on August 8, 2007, Judge Huvelle awarded a \$3 million default judgment against J.C. to the co-conspirator, unaware that the co-conspirator had gone to prison in Ohio for the very acts that were the supposed subject of the defamation lawsuit. When the Ashland County prosecutor in Ohio alerted Judge Huvelle that the co-conspirator was on parole for having molested J.C. when he was a minor, the judge immediately vacated the default judgment and set a hearing on the matter for August 16, 2007.

According to the Statement of the Offense, at the hearing Brandel testified falsely under oath that he had served a copy of the co-conspirator lawsuit on J.C., when in fact he later admitted he did not do so, and it was the object of the conspiracy to fool the Court into thinking that J.C. had been served with the lawsuit and consented to the judgment against him.

In announcing the guilty plea, Acting U.S. Attorney Phillips and FBI Assistant Director in Charge Persichini commended the work of the FBI Special Agents involved, assistance from Ashland County Ohio Prosecutor Ramona Rogers and officers from the Ashland Ohio Police Department, as well as the staff of the U.S. Attorney's Office, including Legal Assistant Jamasee Lucas, and Paralegals Diane Hayes, and Mary Treanor, and Assistant U.S. Attorney James A. Mitzelfeld, who is prosecuting the case.

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